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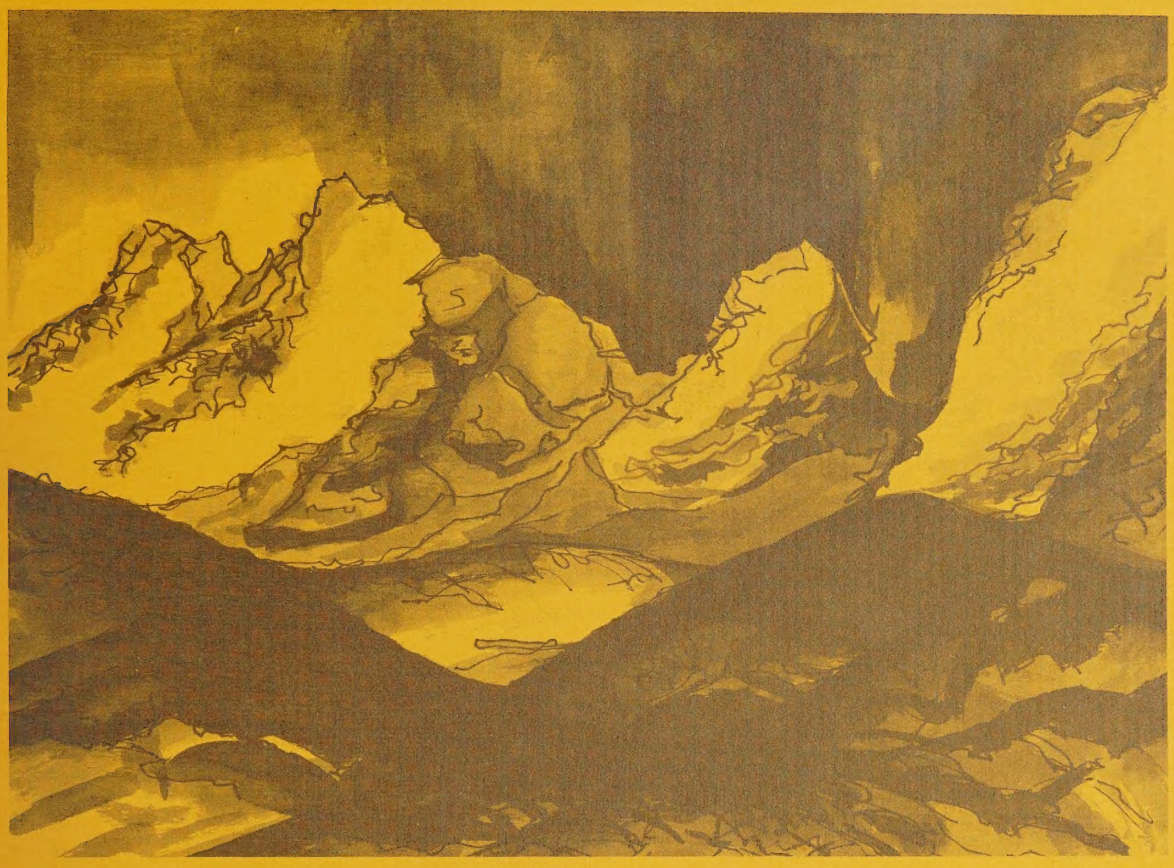

Dixie Taylor

A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH

The bell rang once, and then twice. With my eyes still closed in half-sleep, I tried to find the alarm clock to turn it off, I couldn't find the clock but I did manage to knock the lamp off the bedisde table. That woke me up, and I opened my eyes and realized that the telephone had rung, not my alarm. "God damn those patients" I muttered. "Why can't they let Daddy sleep late for a change." I lay back down but couldn't get back to sleep. I got out of bed, thinking, "If Dad has to make a house-call, maybe he'll let me drive him." I just gotten my driver's permit and jumped at every chance to drive. I pulled on jeans and a sweatshirt and found Daddy putting on his jacket and pants over his pajamas.

"Do you have to make a call, Dad?"

"Yes, the Feltmans have asked me to come over." His ruddy face was calm, but his blue eyes and a subtle tenseness in them. I know all about the Feltmans because Daddy had been seeing their daughter since she was born. She was still just a baby, and she was dying. Her father was a loom repairman, and her mother was an inspector at the textile mill. They had three other children, all grown and gone from home. The child Daddy was seeing had some sort of rare disease — he told me the name of it, but I've forgotten it now. They had taken her to Duke Medical Center and Johns Hopkins, and anywhere else they thought they might be able to find help for her, but finally they gave up. They brought her back home, and she lay wasting in her crib, never crying, never laughing.

Dad said I could drive him, and he got his bag and we went out to the car. It was a beautiful Sunday morning, and I suddenly remembered that it was Easter. Dew covered the grass and the windshield of the car. The air was clear and mild, and the new leaves on the trees were sharply green. We pulled away from the house and Daddy told me that the little girl had died early that morning. I had never seen her, and I only saw her parents when they came onto their front porch to see Daddy out. The baby's death was not unexpected, but Daddy's face made my stomach cave into itself and stay that way in a sticky ball.

I had seen Daddy's face like that only once before, when my grandfather died. I was only eight and I had asked Daddy if he had cried. He had answered only, "No, I don't like to feel sorry for myself."

He looked straight ahead, watching the road until we pulled into the gutted driveway of the Feltman's home. Mr. Feltman was standing on the porch. He had on a gray work shirt, open at the collar, and his hands were deep in the pockets of his pants. He was tall and gaunt, grey-haired, and he stood there, staring.

I glanced at Dad's face. The look was gone and he was calm. He turned to me and met my eyes. "Do you want to come in?" I was surprised, and I wanted to say no. I had never been in a house when someone had died. I didn't want to see the sadness I knew would be there. My father could take it, it was part of his job. I could ignore death, and pretend it didn't exist if I wanted to. But I opened my door, and we walked across the yard to the porch. Daddy didn't introduce me to Mr. Feltman. He just put his square

hand on the taller man's shoulder. Neither of them spoke. Mr. Feltman turned and opened the screen door, and we went inside.

We walked straight through the living room over the polished wood floor. I noticed a picture of Christ hanging above the sofa. Almost every house in the mill village had one of those pictures, Christ's face, beardless and kind, surrounded by a golden halo. The pictures were always in a gilded oval frame.

We followed Mr. Feltman down a short hall into his daughter's room. It was pink with white frilly curtains. The clean spring sun poured in the windows, happily lighting the neatly arranged stuffed animals and pretty dolls. The crib over in one corner was empty. Mrs. Feltman, as tall and as gaunt as her husband, sat on a straight-backed chair in the middle of the room, holding the child's body across her lap. She sat there, weeping, not making any noise, her tears sliding down her face, off her chin onto her dead baby. My father took the child from her, bracing the head so that it wouldn't fall back. I left the room and went out to wait in the car.

Daddy stayed in the house barely five minutes, routinely checking the child and filling out the death certificate. When he came out, Mr. Feltman followed and they stood on the porch for a minute. Once again Daddy put his hand on Mr. Feltman's shoulder, not looking at him. He came down the steps and across the yard, and got in the car.

I was glad to start the car and get away from that house. Daddy sat silent. I wanted him to say something to me, explain what had just happened. He was used to this sort of thing, death, and I know he could make it easier for me to accept. I glanced at him, starting to ask him to help me. His face wasn't calm anymore. He looked bewildered like I had been when my puppy died. Immediately I looked back at the road and remained quiet the rest of the way home. I had wanted to ask him to explain death to me, but I couldn't because I had seen the tears in his eyes.

Ann Snoddy

NINA

Singapore babies

bloating in the sun

as Grandma weaves . . .

Gypsy mama laughing in the leaves.

Jane Ariail

UNTITLED NO. 1

One early winter's day when I was a young girl I rode along beside Mama in Papa's old 1933 Packard. She told me three times to keep my feet around the cloth-covered dish of beans so that it wouldn't slide on the worn rubber floor. Neither of us was very much in the mood to talk that day.

"Hold tight over the bumps," she said as we slid around an unexpected curve.

We were on the way out to the country to see old Mr. Grover, a Sunday School teacher at our church. We had heard from the postman that morning that his wife had died the night before of double pneumonia. I didn't know his wife but I sure knew Mr. Grover, and I didn't like him. That's why I was quiet as we bounced along. I wanted to play hop scotch or jump rope with the new girl down the street instead of going to see mean Mr. Grover. "He wouldn't care if he sees us or anyone," I said to myself. "Best to leave folks like that alone."

Three years ago Mr. Grover had come to our house, and I would not forget that visit. He always wore black and parted his patent leather hair right straight down the middle, and black shoes, He walked alone most of the time and looked straight in front of him, and sometimes in the church halls he whistled hymns. He did not seem like a cheerful man at all, however. "A man with purpose," Papa said. I thought he looked exactly like a character in a Halloween-tale book that I owned — especially his widow's peak and deep-set eyes. And so, the night that I looked up to see him staring into our living room window, I was scared and surprised. I was sitting with Mama holding the cat in my lap while we talked about the festival coming up at school. Mama and I caught sight of him at the same time standing at the window with his hands concealed under his hat as though he were hiding some secret.

"Come round to the door, Mr. Grover," Mama motioned to the window, "the bell doesn't work." Her smile of welcome faded when she saw his solemn face.

As he stepped into the house, he said right off, "Now, Mrs. Simpson, I've something to tell you. Your husband died of a heart attack on the job twenty minutes ago. He's dead." His voice sounded hollow and far away.

Mama just looked into his face for a moment and then she started to whimper like a new puppy. She grabbed at my skirt but I ran into the back corner of the room where the what-not stood with the little china angels I liked to touch and talk to. I stood there unable to cry and listened to their words as though in a dream.

"What should I do, Mr. Grover," Mama cried in a voice didn't recognize. "Tell me what to do."

Mr. Grover looked at Mama deep out of his eyes, "Fix me some coffee and we'll talk — some coffee and maybe some cake to go with it."

I turned at those words just in time to see Mama look at him with the eyes of a dumb animal, soft and puzzled. At that moment I hated that tall and practical man for his lack of sympathy, but I hated my mother too for blindly obeying his command. Mama moved about the kitchen like a stiff-legged puppet getting down cups and plates.

Mr. Grover left soon and neighbors began coming in one by one weighted down with roasters, pots, and bowls — sad gifts of hams, turkeys, apple pies and cakes. And, of course, lots of potato salad.

"Just something to help out," I heard from more than one of the hatted, black figures who hovered around the house for several days making Mama cry and remember. "Sit down, honey, we'll do the work. There's nothing for you to do at all."

Those days somehow ended and even the memories lost some of their sting as we made life go on without Papa. The nights weren't quite so scary for me now, and Mama saw friends again. Now and then, I even heard her laugh while I lay in my bed late at night.

"Well, almost there. Mind those beans," Mama's voice called me back to the present. A dead leaf floated down onto the long black hood of the car. The wind whipped it up in a hurry as we bounced along but soon another took its place.

The car jerked to a stop and as I stepped out onto the running board, the air cut into my face. I gathered my jacket around me, but my nose still began to ache. Mama carried the beans, and I walked along in back of her and watched the steam drift up and vanish from the earthen pot. Through a thick tunnel of rose bushes we got our first look at Mr. Grover's small home. The door leaned on rusted hinges and the steps sagged away from the house. The windows were foggy from some activity inside. Mama pulled a black strap which hung from a bell by the door. I held tight to her skirt, but still felt my stomach leap when the door knob rattled in someone's hand. I was afraid to see Mr. Grover and embarrassed about what to say to him.

"Why do I have to go," I whispered hurriedly, as the door cracked, "he really doesn't want to see anyone. You'll see."

Mr. Grover stood before us, filling the door. I looked for his black shoes but saw worn slippers. His whiskers stuck out from his face at funny angles and his eyes looked ringed and faded. A flannel robe hung from his shoulders, and his black trousers showed underneath.

"I'm sorry about your wife, Mr. Grover," Mama said and reached for his long limp fingers with her plump hand. "We've come to see about you."

Mr. Grover motioned us into a small hall with highly polished floors and fresh white-washed walls. There were framed pictures of groups of children covering both walls. The girls wore white dresses and hair bows, and the boys stood behind them dressed in white suits and neckties. They all clutched rolled up tubes of paper in their hands. "Sunday School graduations," I thought practically as we walked down the narrow hall.

"This is the kitchen," Mr. Grover nudged us forward with his words. The smell of frying bacon surrounded us.

"I'm making breakfast just in case. It's a long way out here over those roads."

Mama and I looked at each other at the same moment. Her eyes told me what I already knew. Mr. Grover was alone.

Mama adjusted her skirt and reached for an apron hanging by the old gas stove. "That's a splendid idea. Let's cook some eggs to go along with that bacon — just in case."

I sat up straight at the pine table and felt very grown-up. I leaned back against the solid chair and called, "Make lots of toast too, Mr. Grover. I'm real hungry."

Clara Seagrave

SLEEP

Sleep crept slowly off my muscles.
Last night's sounds
Vibrated between my ears.
The waves of five men plugged in a socket
Concentrated between my eyebrows,
And as finger nails on a blackboard
Crept up and over my hairline.
Halloween of the mind.
Witches riding spades and jacks attached
to spokes.
Brains riding on wash and dry cycle.
An electric saw squealed
Ripping medulla oblongota
Hung
Over.

Elizabeth Gaskin

I rode a Continental Trailways bus
the other day
Past putt-putt golf where les miserables
Knocked white balls into
Dinasaur orafices
Past Ed Salem's drive-in
(The one with the neon football
flashing over neon goal posts)
Animals ate there, refusing to laugh,
to breathe human breath
And I looked at the corpses around me,
at the one driving my fate
(I was the only one he didn't tell
to watch his step when we got off
in Marietta)
Oh hang it up, human race
You been longing for cellophane oblivion
so long
Just hang it up and drop the godforsaken
pretence
And I'm sitting here crying
As I scribble this out
Knowing what the hell use is there
in trying
And you don't understand
Because you've got your head firmly
tucked up some dinosaur's ass
And
can't see
Or
don't believe in
A new spark

Beth Pate

THE AGENT

I wasn't expecting you,
    though I should have
your watch was always set five minutes
    fast
so you would be early,
tap your toe,
looking condescending,
attempts at explanations fell
warm and limp at your feet.
always forgetting that it was your fault
in being early;
I stood twisting my fingers with my
    words
Begging pardon, praying for the return
of that frothy smile.
Too well aware that you could cancel
all of me
shuffle me into oblivion beneath a pile
of phone numbers
and paper faces.
Nightmares struck me out of bed too often;
to stand at 5 a.m.
waiting for a taxi.
Sometimes, in that manic
    fit of power
that only paupers feel,
I throw dirt on your grave.
only to dig you up again
giving you my flowers
my applause, my thanks
for everything you've done for me
    since we met on the ferry
and I told you I could sing.

Mary Crow

LEOLA

Leola ambles down the hallway which is crowded with limp suitcases and bleak trunks. She inches her way around them, dragging the swollen plastic bag behind her. A toneless hymn rises and falls with her flushy mouth, always lifting as high as she is wide. Coffee-grain eyes flicker and mahogony limbs protrude from beneath a starched blue uniform which cuts just inches above her ankles of folding flush. Leola falters, dropping over with difficulty to pick up a piece of crumpled newspaper. A day passes as she rises. Slowly, she straightens to pad noiselessly away in ancient tennis shoes.

Sue Sublett

AFTERMATH

For days the rains fell charging, Having
all but extinguished the paling signal fames
that called to home those who'd fled.

Hopes had shattered as we gathered
beside high banks, muddied, hollow-riddled;
had shuddered as the wind bore ill-omeded firings to
the ear.

Hand raked hand in attempt to pare
the crusting gore from beneath the nail.

They returned. Some
in caravans of browing crimson. Bearing all.

The mudless sky, slow sweating down
with rank, with rancid heat.
to curdle sores that had so feared to heal.

They arched in long, contorted silences.
Able, but barely, to mutely touch, helpless,
We stared on.

Then we returned.
to shells
of self, of home.
moved in whispers.
Having drowned ourselves in high-gloried wastes.
Ever haunted by the images of trembled tug
of raking hand, wetless tears, the paring of
the crusted gore from beneath the browning nail.

Cynthia Anchors

UNTITLED

in returning home:
an observation

It is an old woman of a town.
an eyeless old woman who sits rocking,
lost in blank, in sightless staring.
Yet, somehow, it is home.

well-planned, square-blocked.
a thoughtless town.

As I came down over the hill that was a mountain,
came down in angered hesitation; it whimpered.
I did not question.

I have never looked it in the eyes,
but the hands are gentle.

They are old woman's hands
and they lie, folded in laps all too-crowded with flesh,
and they move only as the breathing wills them move—
with the tempered rise of barren bellies.

Cynthia Anchors

"But I'm out here, not in there."

I gripped the cold steering wheel and accelerated. My car bore down on the rain slicked road. Fat raindrops pounded against the window shield. I didn't understand why I could not feel pity. Nor did I know why I kept going back to the hospital. I knew I had done nothing to help those deformed bodies; those minds that understood so little. No-one could. I asked a nurse once if she felt she was doing something worth while working at the mental hospital. She answered simply, "I have to, but if you wake up every morning and think of the kids at this hospital or at Bangladash, you'll never make it." But it seemed so unfair — those bodies knocked down before birth, peering inside that clean, anteseptic-scented bomb.

That morning, Mike a spastic had broken a nurse's wrist as she tried to bathe him. The wrist had snapped. The nurse was silent for a moment before she realized what had happened. Mike never knew. He has never known the power of his steel body's contortions. He could not be helped, only cared for through that sense of justice that separated man from animals.

I remember watching some of the hospital children play outside. Susan was picking flowers and crumbling them into the hands of the other children. I asked the nurse if Susan knew what she was doing. The nurse said quietly, "Do you?"

Still, I could not feel pity. I felt nothing, and hated myself for it.

Victoria Remishofsky

MEMORIAL PARK

Canvas canopies create
artificial skies
Protecting plastic mums in
plastic cones.
Steel clamping teeth bite hunks
of clay — with no regret

Two pale-eyed ducks
glide by
Barely breaking the water
Their heads bowed
Looking for bread.

Fall leaves are brash and brazen huzzys
Hanging on the arms of important oaks.
In final fury they blaze, let go
and drift away.
Leaving important oaks naked and alone.

Clara Seagrave

ALONE

On August days down shadow paths, alone
To be together with myself for once
Is mocking tar-tipped streets, again
With hungry lips which lick me

Sue Sublett

LESS THAN LOVINGLY

You were my creator
first,
when everything you touched became
extra-sensory me.

You were my cremator
last,
when you shoveled me into the cement
vault,
and set fire to my failure
relishing the blue flame.

You even let my
closest relatives watch,
and when it was over,
you poured my ashed into
a white alabaster jar.

In your pocket, comfortably close
almost alive again
At the house, in your room,
my jar was
    added
to the treasure on your desk
photographs and momentos
business papers.

Watching you
    I wish
You'd loved me
    a little less

Mary Crow

THE SCRAPBOOK

Report all changes, get excited!
We're all dying to know when you
  Get married!
That is of course, on the assumption
That it doesn't occur sometime
  Around Christmas.

Future plans include a husband;
One of those necessities of life.
Unfortunately I'll settle for a Masters,
Leaving someone to equate those two
  Don't fret—a Ph. D. is just like
Having a baby—certainly, the joy of labor pains.

Report all changes, get excited!
We're all dying to know when you
  Well, whatever!
So sorry she couldn't make it back this year.
The baby's ill—how are yours?
Quite well, both framed and hanging.

Marcia Cooke

NIGHT-TIME IN NIGGERTOWN

Night-time comes to Niggertown.
Brothers and Sisters hit the streets;
Old folks sit out on the front stoops.
Mothers put their kids to bed
Silently praying that the rats will find something else to eat.
Big Black men sit in small rooms in what used to resemble chairs
And cry, cause they know there ain't no way out of those holes.
Somebody cussing; somebody gitting beat.
Nobody hears; none of their business.
Gitting later and later all the time.
Old folks still sit and talk.
Mothers and fathers—husbands and wives, sit and stare,
Finally go to bed.
She cries herself on off to sleep;
He just stares at the cracks in the ceiling.
Brothers and Sisters come in making noise.
Yeah! they been partying hearty!
Old folks just look and shake their heads.
Remember when they were young, used to party, too.
For them—sloppy drunk, today—stoned.
Don't make no difference how you do it though.
All you want to do is forget—forget what you already been through,
And what you already know's waiting for you.
Old folks get up and drag up the narrow dark steps.
Used to be able to move faster, but then,
There ain't no real hurry,
No place in particular to go.
Mighty right, no place at all to go.
And just knowing it is what's so bad.
Brothers and Sisters know; they headed nowhere
Mothers and fathers, they all know it too.
Old folks say they ain't been nowhere and ain't got no more time to get nowhere.
And they're all in their own private hell,
Every night,
All night,
When night-time comes to Niggertown.

Marcia Cooke

BAD TIMING

Yesterday

I realized that I
was actually going to

Die

Someday, and before I could
Do anything about it

I died.

Marcia Cooke

UNTITLED NO. 1

When it's all crushed
And piled up for burning
Like the endless leaves
On surburban curbs
In front of neatly cut lawns
And box houses
When it falls
Not tumbling in majestic defeat
But crumbling from inner decay
As year-old newspapers
When the celluloid is cracked
And dust blankets all
The green will break through
We will live my love
Nous demurons mon amour

Beth Pate

MEETINGS

We are wolves tonight
Huddled close to the fire.
Our one concern – life.
We lick our lips
to tease parched throats.
Our bodies' fetid warmth
Is all that safety is.

In a formal tea-set room
We are wolves tonight.

Clara Seagrave

TO HELEN (AFTER SOME YEARS)

There were the nights:
Custom and the burning horns
butt at the ramparts of the marrow of us;
the moon staggers,
shouldering the folded dark,
and the down of your thigh
catches light
like swords.
Now, with night's end, our darkness settles.
The traffic coughs. Heavily,
like the greyness on the rivers,
you slump
as to a prayer
and hook your bra with fumbling care.
Another day's come round in Troy.
Custom wounds us (newness is more golden than your hair) –
but should our giving gates be breached
we will have one death, one love, to mourn.

C.D.H. Reynolds

ANOTHER BEAUTIFUL MORNING ON BEAMAN STREET

The day cranked-up when
the cat
ran the dog
up the tree.
And you . . . all puppy cuddled with shades drawn . . .
Woke-up to another beautiful morning
on Beaman Street.
I cooked your favorite breakfast . . .
Frosted Flakes and Seven Up . . .
While Mr. Moose blared,
"it'll be Monday all day long!"
Then right in the middle of
Our second Seven-Up . . .
The Man came on
And blabbed for thirty minutes
On the Pollution,
And the Inflation,
And the War,
And everything else stinks in the
world!
"That's just Monday's news!" you screamed
And knocked the fishbowl
over.
Lucky for the fish, they were in the sink.
"Why can't he announce
Billy Finkle's sixth birthday or
today's menu at Bruce's cafe?"
You frowned.
Fifteen minutes later you walked
out
the door . . .

Not even a Good-bye. (It was only Monday morning.)
I wished you'd stayed all puppy-cuddled
that Monday on Beaman Street . . .
And that the dog
had run the cat
up the tree, instead.

Ann Phillips

TO JOHN BERRYMAN'S IMPLOSION

From bridge to water
goes the concentric
circle of feelings
over and over
falling turning
down and
suddenly
spiraling upward
good night
my brother

Noel Walker

Nancy Fischer

Dixie Taylor

Christie Taylor

A girl in a mud-splattered and faded brown coat and white patent leather boots walked slowly through the October afternoon. Her hair brushed the top of her shoulders and the brown strands almost covered her large eyes. She stopped, took a rubber band from her pocket and carelessly pulled a wad of hair back from her face into a pony tail. She walked carefully to avoid the shadows of the trees as they fell like prison bars across the grass. There was no lightness in her step. "Step on a crack, break your mother's back," she mumbled softly as she stepped across each shadow into the light.

She had not been home since she dropped out of high school four years ago and moved to Atlanta to work as a cocktail waitress. Her visions of independence faded as she found herself dependent upon a petty and unfeeling boss. She had no friends and on lonely nights in her rented room she remembered her home with Aunt Nan, her cousins and imagined long talks with them like the days when they were children together. She heard from them only at Christmas and wrote them now and then. Somehow she put off a trip home saving the comfort and delight for when things really got tough for her. It was her ace in the hole as she called it. She often said to the mirror in her room, "Well, I can always go home where I'm appreciated. Suddenly a decision was made for her. The telegram read, "We need you to sign papers. Aun Nan is dead. Come home."

Her eyes moved slowly searching for familiar objects but the neighborhood was changed. The people obviously had no time for charm. She passed a pink metal pelican standing on one foot next to a drying-up fish pond, and glanced at the houses shedding blistered paint. She reached the door of a victorian white-frame, its gingercake trim falling away as if in defiance of neglect. The door was unlocked and the loose knob rattled in her hand. The scratched glass panel shuttered as the door slammed behind her.

She had lived in this house with Aunt Nan for nine years, from the time her mother died and her father left with his new wife. She remembered the cozy Saturday smell of corned beef and cabbage boiling on the stove in the dark kitchen, the chirping of the canary in the sunroom, and the drone of the dusty fan in her own room — company on a hot summer night. Now the houes was cold and almost empty. A change from the days when she and her young cousins romped from room to room playing hide and seek under the massive pieces of oak furniture. Aunt Nan lived in the house all of her life and remained there two years ago when Uncle Donald died. Brenda had discussed this at the meeting the night before with the cousins. One cousin had remarked, "She lacked the imagination to look for something else." Another added, "Laziness." Brenda only listened remembering Aunt Nan's warm smile as she tenderly dusted her little pieces of bric-a-brac that filled the rooms.

The meeting was held at Cousin Stan's drug store where they gathered to talk about details.

"Nan left no money, only the house," Cousin Jack began.

"We'll rent her out - room by room then. More

money by the inch than by the yard," cousin George, the undertaker, replied. He chuckled with his hard little bright blue eyes, but his eyes were trite unsmiling.

The cousins nodded as they consummed great quantities of cola and fried pies, resting their elbows on the sticky counter.

She was here to help clear out the house. Her thoughts were interrupted by cousins sweating and laughing as they carefessly pushed dresses and shoes into large cardboard grocery boxes and hurried to clear out the rooms. Sagging curtains, their large stitches rotting away, were snatched down and stuffed into dusty piles with stained bedspreads and lumpy pillows. Bundles of half-finished rag dolls and stuffed animals were thrown carelessly on top. As she stood watching a large cousin glanced at her and flashed an empty smile. "Get to work, Brenda, let's clear this junk out." She knew she should help but she continued to watch and wandered about the room stepping between piles of sorted-out hats, pocketbooks, and sweaters and shawls. In the corner an artist's frame leaned against the wall. She held it up.

"Here's something worth keeping, one of Aunt Nan's paintings," she said to the cousins.

"My god, girl," beefy cousin Johnny roared, "throw it out. Her junky creations are in every attic in the family."

"Merry Christmas from Aunt Nan," sounded a shrill voice from the back of the room.

They all cackled in unison. All but Brenda.

"What a disappointment," Cousin George contributed. She didn't leave a thing worth a damn. Why, hell, I came over here at least every month to see about the damn hot water heater and listened to that old bore talk about the days when we was kids."

Brenda realized that not one cousin had spoken of the good times they had as young children - the hot biscuits, jello puddings, and sugar cookies they greedily received from Aunt Nan's warm pink hands. The hours spent gathered around while Aunt Nan read them stories and poems and told them little riddles.

"They don't care one bit that she's gone," she said aloud. "They don't care that she's not coming back - never."

She suddenly felt compelled to escape into the fresh air. The mass of sweating bodies added to her uneasiness. She stumbled over a pile of mildewed shoes and fell against the door. It slammed behind her. In her hand she still clutched the painting, and she suddenly held it very tight against her. As she walked through a shower of falling leaves, she breathed in the rich smell of smoldering fall bonfires. Her feet avoided the bits of broken concrete jutting out fo the rgass as she turned toward the station, the bus to Atlanta, and home.

Clara Seagrave

SUNDAY

The day was like a picture
The sky was like a pane
Of stained glass on a haltar.
A bird sang the refrain.

We knelt to worship Nature
In all her beauty clear.
We lay down underneath a tree
And opened a can of beer.

The woods were all around us
Speckled and spotted with light.
We laughed and kissed and sipped our beer
And knew we'd soon be tight.

Darkness came without a high
We couldn't let it pass.
So we lit a match and smelled
The incense of the grass.

The aroma was delightful,
We giggled and laughed and grinned.
We gathered up our beer cans,
The service was at an end.

Ann Snoddy

HESOID

Ancient leaves
placed neatly by the wind
under a single tree
click and rustle
quietly
back and forth
only for the pleasure
of hearing themselves dry up
in dreams
of yesterday
When the future
is too near under
the ground for them
to blow away from.

A. Noel Walker

UNTITLED NO. 3

Put your hands on your head.
Directly below your fingertips
Is a bunch of gray wrinkles.
That is your individuality.
Everyone has a bunch of gray wrinkles.
Conformist.

Beth Pate

AT DUSK CAME THEY TO SODOM'S RUIN

We broke the crest of the hill and stood,
old gods abandoned, left to ruin;
felt the night came rolling down
to setlte.

And the valley crawled in folds of earth;
from seas of rubble, darkness came,
Burnt out stone, crumbling wood, a moment's thought
reflected.

The moon's light, grey, played tricks on eyes
as grey ruins took then, stranger forms.
The biting stench of smouldering stone
came haunting.

And hovering minds, that bearing down,
seared the eye, chilled the hard at rest on stones
that were in shapes of angry men, who writhing slept
in yearning.

The hand, drawn back, clenched then the arm, and
shuddering, rolled upon the sleeve; far
new lands a-thirst. The old found
sown with salt.

Cynthia Anchors

PRAYERS

When Sister Berthe taught me to
pray,
I knelt at the side of her chair
feasting my downcast eyes
on the spotless hem — her blue wool habit
caressing her knees.
White wimple, smug shadow
underneath, I discovered her eyes
and rejoiced in their
parakeet hue.
After matins, in the gardens
I followed a grace between
the mazed hedges
watching the gardeners as they clipped
the rosey thorns before laying them
in her arms
with a kiss
on the tips of her fingers.
Desires for her graces burned holes in
their gloves.
I thought I was as close to
Heaven
as I'd ever be
hearing her talk
to the mockingbirds in the peach trees;
but mostly I think it was envy
because she could talk to the
Father
and go on long, breezeway walks
with Pastor Callahan.

Mary Crow

Black boots bite into white snow hill
Impressions of a climb —
an eager returning —
High red walls, now buildings
are tunnels to the light.

Clara Seagrave

Bookery Bookery Doc!

PAGES OF OPPOSING

SENTENCES KEEP A

STRAIGHT FACE EVEN

WHEN THE BOOK IN

CLOSING MAKES A

LAUGHING STOCK OF WORDS.

E. T. Weiant

Lightning glances — anxious laughter.
The billowing minds of my students gather
in Seminar.
Like thunderclouds.
This heavy afternoon,
by candle light,
each Tat'yana dwells alone
in silence on a deep concern
as they in turn cast fortunes
of wax in the water.
Re: One'gim. Stanza 8 of CAnto V.
Their
eyes lean in
from the shelter of tresses.
From a trellis of elbows,
their eyes
lean in
watching the Silver Bowl
where Meaning draws its self
into the wrinkled fetus of a LOOK! Through
the Window,
outside!
Who'd every believe it?
Eleven trees and a bench, in the rain.
Her presents.
Wrapped in cloudburst — tied with a bow.
Just beyond our reach.

E. T. Weiant

Papa died early one Sunday morning.
Everybody brought food and said that it was better that way. Why do people always say it's better when somebody dies? Mama didn't think so, me neither— and I told them so.

Mama died on Christmas Day.
Everybody came to the funeral and afterwards to the house to eat all the food that Mama had cooked on Christmas Eve. Why did they do that? I wanted to have it when I got hungry so I could pretend that Mama was still here. I asked them, but they got mad and said I was ungrateful.

I died Saturday afternoon and nobody said anything. I'm not sure, but maybe that's because there's nothing special about dying on Saturday — in the afternoon.

Marcia Cooke

GRIEF

If I could see again his smile.

If I could hear again his voice.

If he could again live.

If I could die.

Marcia Cooke

I am a total
of my thoughts
and dreams my loves
and my fears
I stand bent unbroken
folded over.
Yet I will stand
up and hold my
song in my lungs
till with one pull
upward I will
sing my life
and become
the song I want to
live

Noel Walker

AFTERWARDS

Not much left behind:
matches, a dented watch, loose change
frayed ticket stubs, grey toothpicks
and socks —
one with holes.

Clara Seagrave

A tall man dressed in a black shirt and white clerical collar walked out of his home into a glaring July sun to speak to a short dark man standing, hat in his hand, at the door. Because the large man was from the North and not accustomed to the strong southern sun, perspiration ran down his face and disappeared beneath the high round ring which encircled his neck.

"Morning, Rev. Johnson. Another hot one," the brown man said showing his empty mouth. You'all got a dead tree here in front."

"That so, Sam. I didn't notice," the tall man glanced up quizzically at three towering skinny pines above the house. "Look here, Reverend. This one's been bit by the jelly worm and won't last the summer. The first good storm'll take her right down for you. She's aiming right for the house too." The brown man scratched his coarse hair with one bony and corded hand. "Pity to stove in such a nice house."

"It certainly would be, Sam. Not ours you know. It belongs to the church," he ran a long thin index finger around under his celluloid collar. "Sam, where've you been this summer? I haven't passed your truck lately."

As Sam shifted his weight slowly from one foot to the other he replied, "Well, sir, been down in the back lately. My wife, she say it's the arthritis or else meanness," he flashed a toothless grin. "But my son's boy he can handle a saw good as I can. He's my helper now."

It was obvious that the two men, though not familiar, had established a special relationship understood completely by the two of them.

The brown man stooped to the ground and picked up a small green tomato. It had been split open, and the still viable seeds ran down his crisp brown skin. "Someone pick your little tomatoes too soon? Kids, I reckon."

The priest rubbed a large transparent hand over his straight thin hair. His washed-out blue eyes avoided the brown man's face. "You know, Sam, I wish it were just kids, but more than that. We came out this morning to find all our young tomatoes picked – those that weren't split open on the ground and stepped on had been thrown at the door." He glanced at the kitchen window where a young woman stood washing lunch dishes. "I guess we're what you might call the strange ones in the neighborhood."

The black man's warm brown eyes searched the priest's cold and chalk-white face. "Yes, sir, I reckon I knows what you mean. Folks, folks, folks."

Clara Seagrave

"If you lean over you'll fall right in the water," Matt said to his younger brother, who dangled off of the old rotting well. He began to have that strange feeling in his stomach. The feeling always came when he disobeyed his mother or felt that her feelings might be hurt about him. He liked for her to call him "mama's trustworthy boy."

"I just wanted to see my face in the water like you did," Tad replied to the larger boy who jerked him down by one foot.

"Draw it up, idiot, and leave the bucket on the hook or Mama'll guess we've been here, and I don't want no more spankings for while. Get in the wagon."

The younger boy climbed into a rusty red wagon, and the wheels squeaked monotonously as they moved slowly down the dusty and stony path.

"Let's change paths," Tad petitioned, "I'm scared to go so close to Aunt Sara's house cause she'll get mad. I hear something moving around in there sometime even when Aunt Sara's in our kitchen."

"Me too," Matt answered. "Come on Tad, let's see what's in there."

"No sir, not me," the younger boy's eyes widened, and he held on to both sides of the wagon with his plump pink hands.

Matt deliberately pulled the wagon nearer the house. "We're going to knock on the door," he said.

"Not me; I'm not," said the smaller boy as he shinnied from the wagon.

"If you don't, I'll tell Mama you climbed on the well," Matt called.

Tad turned around and walked slowly back to his brother.

Aunt Sara's house leaned to one side and the chimney stood straight up into the air letting little puffs of smoke escape into the late summer afternoon. A clothes-line tied between the house and a tall dead pine tree sagged under the weight of three blue uniforms which hung limply in the still heat. Aunt Sara, the large quiet woman who worked in their kitchen day in and day out had lived in the tenant house for almost a year. She appeared one day riding in the back of an old pickup truck, asked permission to move in and unloaded her concealed cargo by night. The only one the boys ever saw near the house was Aunt Sara, but the two boys heard noises in the early evenings as they passed the house from their berry picking. Aunt Sara was friendly in her quiet way but she never wanted the boys to visit her. She always said, "you let me come to your house, don't never come to mine."

"Matt, why is there smoke from the chimney if someone isn't there." Tad asked as he tugged on his older brother's sleeve. The window in front of them was so smoked up that they could only see their reflection even though they tried to peer through the glass.

"Let's pretend to be taking up money from the church," the older boy stood tall and swelled out with his brilliance.

A knock on the hollow door was answered by a weak voice from the other side, "Is that you, Sara?"

Private prisons are produced
By playing perfect personalities
perpetually.

Beth Pate

Kim Rhein

"No, mam, we're from the church," Matt answered as he punched Tad in the side.

"Come in then, honey," the voice answered.

The two boys opened the door slowly and peered around the corner. The walls of the old house were papered with yellowed newspapers. By the dim light they could see daylight jutting in sharply between the cracks. A weak fire smouldered in the blackened stone fireplace, and a black pot dangled above it. In the back of the room was an old wooden bed. In the bed was an old woman with wiry grey hair. Her head rested on a grimy pillow.

"Come over here, honey, so's I can make you out. I'm bout blind," she beckoned with a long finger. "You from church to see me? Which church?"

Matt's stomach felt awful and he searched for his voice. "Yes mam, to collect for the natives across the ocean. He remembered pictures of dark children holding bowls in their claw-like hands. "But that's all right."

The boys were aware of a muted clanging sound. A small black boy stood up from the floor and rubbed his eyes. He was attached to one end of a chain and the chain was attached to the bed. The three boys eyed each other silently.

"This here's Sara's grandchild and my great gran. He's my helper. Stays with me all the time don't you, honey." Pokes the fire and dishes up soup too. He's a good boy to stay with Gran, aren't you, honey."

Matt nudged Tad, and the two boys backed slowly away from the bed. One bony arm reached out from the gloomy room and held Matt fast. "Don't tell Aunt Sara you came here. She'll be mad at me for letting folks in. Can you keep a secret?"

"Yes, mam.No, mam, I won't tell," Matt wrenched free and the boys exploded from the house.

In bed that night Matt and Tad whispered swares never to tell the secret. Matt stared into the cold darkness remembering the gran, the boy and the chain. He could still feel the cold fingers on his arm and see the sad eyes of the chained boy and the dim eyes of the old woman.

Several days passed and his mother noticed that he wasn't eating much. "Why, Matt, your eyes are all grey underneath, and you don't eat hardly a bite of your food. Are you feverish?"

He answered, "No mama," each time she questioned him, but he knew he could carry the secret no longer.

When he found his mother alone at her sewing machine he crept up beside her. The morning sun reflected on the gold chain which held her glasses around her neck and made snakes of light on his dark shirt. His tears made salty splotches on his mother's sewing table as he poured out the secret. He told her about the boy, the old blind woman and the chain.

His mother smiled and went back to her sewing. "Is that all's worrying you, child. Why, I've known that for months. That's the way they live. So what. That's their business. Now you stay away from there and never mention this to Aunt Sara. She's a darn good cook, and I wouldn't want her leaving us on account of your curiosity. Put this out of you mind. It's not our concern."

Matt's cheeks burned. He jabbed a pin into his mother's pin-cushion. As he walked away from the room he heard the drone of his mother's sewing machine.

Matt never went to Aunt Sara's house again. He also avoided the kitchen at his house, but he always visited the old well to look for his reflection whenever he wanted to.

Clara Seagrave

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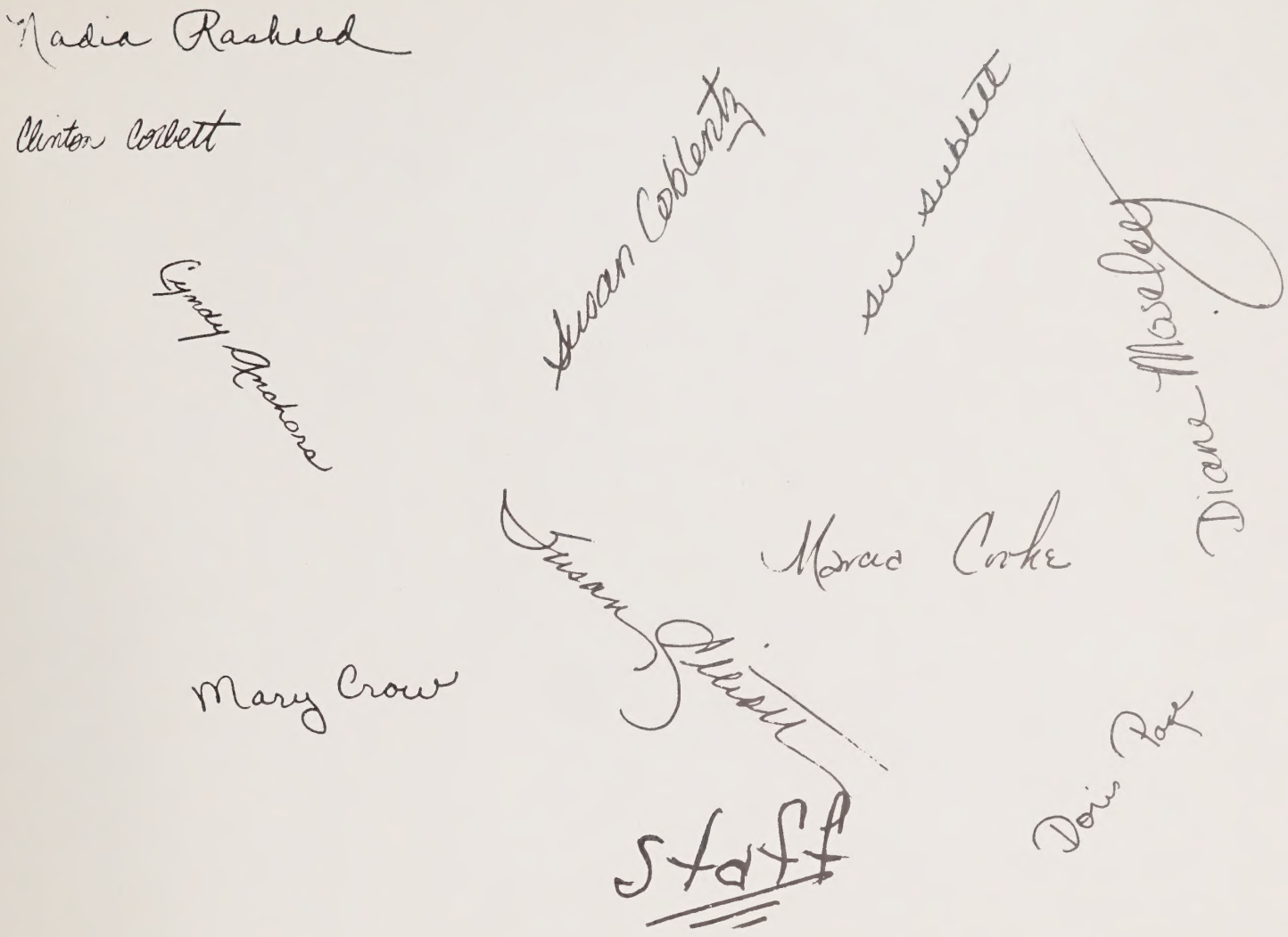
i
wish
you
peace and love
and
a pleasant taste in your mouth.

Retta D'Albora

Jarrell LaGrone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